The Daily Tar Heel

NEWS

Roman Candle's Local Pop Shines; Wu-Tang Claims Hip-Hop Crown

By Staff Editor
December 6, 2000

Roman Candle

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Four Stars 1/2

Many of us have long suspected a truth about music - the agents, the press releases and even the big-name label don't guarantee that it's going to be good. In fact, it seems that the best music out there starts out as the most overlooked.

It's no surprise, therefore, that after a semester thumbing through glossy publicity photos and shiny CD wrappers, the best album I've reviewed is this one: a demo someone happened to hand me.

Roman Candle's self-titled debut proves that no amount of business maneuvering will ever replace the fundamentals of good music: real talent, a knack for songwriting and sincerity. This is a refreshing return to these fundamentals.

The band is composed of two brothers, Skip and Logan Matheny, both of of UNC. This in itself lends them a certain fraternal wholesomeness, along with that local, college-kid charm (not unlike Cambridge, Mass.'s pop darlings The Push Kings).

More important than charm, though, the Mathenys know how to make music - Roman Candle is like a jollier Jeff Buckley mixed with some Rufus Wainwright. Add a bigger

splash of guitar and drums along with an oddly British strain, like a bit of western North Carolina mixed with a dash of Radiohead.

The final ingredient is a lyrical awareness of everyday life, from paper cups to ceiling fans, that is uniquely Roman Candle. It proves to be an addictive mix.

Take "You Don't Belong to This World," an absolutely brilliant pop melody. It's destined to be a single, so bright and catchy that you can't stop singing it, and yet you don't feel guilty.

Proving their versatility, "Merciful Man" is a little more mellow, and like another track, "Sookie," it's reminiscent of Elliott Smith (certainly it's not coincidence that the one of Smith's albums is titled Roman Candle).

The entire CD is like this, each song showing a different facet of the band. In fact, part of Roman Candle's charm is how each song stands independently.

One gets the feeling that they have put a lot of time crafting their music, whether it's the drum intro or bass line. Even when they're rockin', Roman Candle's attention to good song lyrics and vocalist Skip's sweet, honest delivery falls into the singer-songwriter tradition (a tradition too often missing from most hollow popular music).

In short, Roman Candle is good, surprisingly good - just the sort of clean, unaffected kind of music you forgot still existed. Check them out now, because they've got the potential to go places.

By Joanna Pearson

Wu-Tang Clan

The W

Four Stars

In the fly-by-night world of hip hop, artists on top of their game rarely manage to hold on to their spot for much longer than a Redskins place kicker. As in football, it's also true of hip hop that the more attempts you take, the greater the chance that you'll fuck up and fall off.

Therefore, it seems inevitable that the Wu-Tang Clan would be due for a collapse sooner or later. After all, how many Wu member solo releases or Wu-affiliated offshoot projects have we seen in the three years since the last ensemble piece, Wu-Tang Forever? Lately it seems like every other week brings a new solo joint from a U-God or an Inspectah Deck.

Truth be told, the Wu-Tang Clan lost some of its coveted street cred somewhere around the 14th or 15th time that Old Dirty Bastard got arrested for possession of crack, a bulletproof vest, the Dead Sea Scrolls, or the overseas absentee ballots, take your pick.

If ever an album deserved the make-or-break stigma, it would be The W. And if sluggish first week sales are an indication, the ice-centric hip-hop universe might have eclipsed the Wu-Tang Clan.

Sales be damned. The W marks the return of the Wu with a vengeance, and to hell if no one listens, because this crew has always done its own thang-thang regardless of the charts.

As always, the redemption begins with the man behind the boards, Wu-Tang mastermind the Rza. His bare-essentials signature sound, both intimate and cinematic, proved the perfect complement to the front-lines ghetto narratives of Enter the 36 Chambers, and after his Bobby Digital pimp move in 1998, the Rza genius is back in full force.

That much is evident from just the second track, the quintessential Wu banger "Careful (Click Click)." The Rza lays down the most minimal of beats punctuated with an occasional violent clang of bells and drums, and then lets a faint, eerie horn melody ride gently above the imminent crime scene.

Of course, Wu wouldn't be Wu without the verbal gifts of its stellar MCs - Method Man, Raekwon and Ghostace Killah. Add to that potent mix guest rhymes from Redman and Snoop Dogg, and it's clear that Wu only delivers the C.R.E.A.M. de la creme of emcees. Picking up where their 1999 collaboration Black Out left off, Meth and Redman trade verses on "Redbull" with a confidence that belies their experience together.

Far more unexpectedly, the pairing of Snoop Dogg with ODB (last seen on a carton of milk) on "Conditioner" fulfills the paradox of an essential throwaway. The warped humor that ODB exudes every time he steps to the mic proves the perfect antidote to the self-

importance that has dogged Snoop (pun intended) of late, and all of a sudden it's like Mr. Doggy Dogg is back on the prowl.

The same could be said for Wu on The W, a molotov cocktail of an album that (in a perfect world) would restore the Clan to their throne.

By Josh Love

Various Artists

Stoned Immaculate: Music of the Doors

Three Stars 1/2

The joy of the rare good tribute album is hearing the songs of your favorite artist being bent and stretched by a full stable of bands, proving the strength of the songs and their writers in a roundabout way.

That being said, The Doors get what amounts to a pretty good send-up in Stoned Immaculate: The Music of the Doors. Covers are always hit and miss, but the three surviving Doors members seem to have luck going with them.

Few of The Doors' greatest hits go unvisited. If the idea of another Doors greatest-hits album doesn't sit too well, the producers have recruited a variety of stars, including current chart-toppers Creed, Stone Temple Pilots and Aerosmith. Alongside the likes of upstart Smash Mouth and youth rockers Days of the New are living legends Bo Diddley and the Cult and dead legends, like the beat icon William S. Burroughs.

Jim Morrison's original vocal delivery looms like a specter over a large portion of the proceedings. The Stone Temple Pilots' rocking "Break on Through," as well as Creed's unexceptional "Riders on the Storm" and Smash Mouth's organ hop "Peace Frog," features deft Morrison impressions. Maybe they channeled the late lead vocalist in the presence of the other three Doors, who participate on all but two of the tracks in one form or another. It's a strange tribute when the honored are also featured performers.

Stranger still is the presence of Morrison himself on several tracks. Two new Doors song-poems are crafted through sampling and mixing with Morrison's vocals, and on another

track he explains the desert-cruising, hell-on-wheels scene behind "Roadhouse Blues."

The rumination is followed by one of the album's best moments, as Morrison and blues legend John Lee Hooker duet on a smoldering, blues-tinged version of "Roadhouse" that bests the original. Other highlights come from heavy metal group the Cult's ferocious "Wild Child," and Days of the New's lively radio cut of "L.A. Woman."

Stoned also reminds us that covers normally miss the mark more often than not. Ian Astbury's take on "Touch Me" drives the song into the Vegas showbiz kitsch that the Doors avoided, and the night-club swagger of Bo Diddley and his backup singers don't do "Love Her Madly" justice. Aerosmith seems to have faxed in its paint-by-numbers, screeching version of "Love Me Two Times."

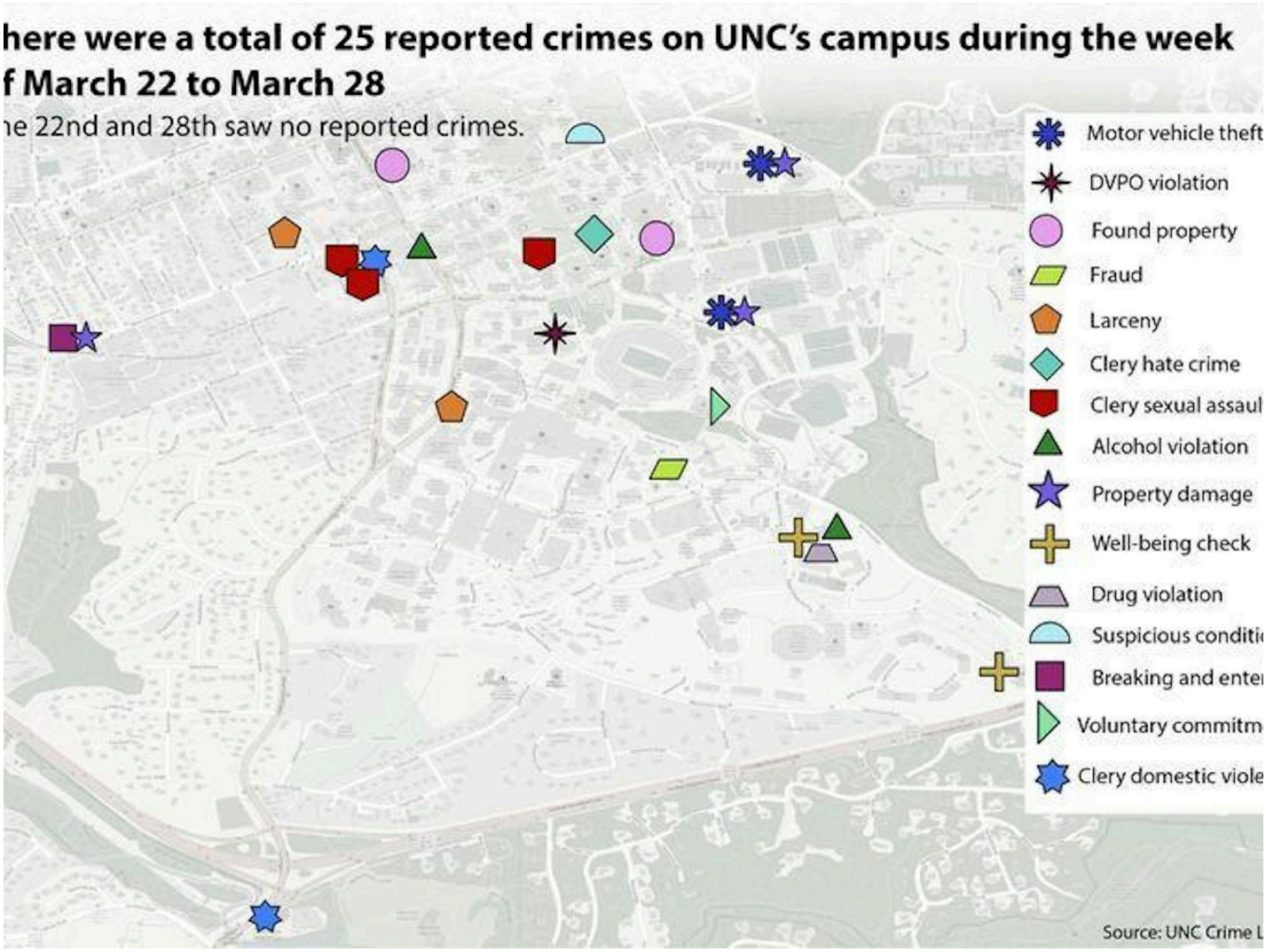
In the end, only the hardest core of Doors fans should invest in the album. Fans of the featured groups might just borrow the few songs they care to hear.

Stoned Immaculate only makes a listener appreciate the real Doors that much more. Unless you're otherwise stirred, try going to the source.

By Brian Millikin

The Daily Tar Heel encourages reader feedback and dialogue. Send us feedback and continue the discussion on social media.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



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By Samiha Bala · 12/2/2025

"Speaking personally, I’m ecstatic to be alive in this era of music — what an awesome era to be able to claim as our own."

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